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SUBJECT: SALVADORAN RESPONSE TO FLOODING DISASTER

Ref A: 09 SANSALVADOR 1051
Ref B: 09 SANSALVADOR 1053

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Severe flooding and landslides triggered by the passing of Hurricane Ida caused significant loss of life and economic damage in El Salvador. Heavy losses in the agricultural sector have many in the GOES concerned about short-term food security. USG relief supplies have arrived in El Salvador and are being distributed to the most severely affected areas aided by the use of four JTF Bravo helicopters. The GOES plans on issuing \$300 million in bonds to finance the rebuilding effort. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Heavy and constant rain over a four-day period brought by the passing of Hurricane Ida caused severe flooding and triggered landslides in five of El Salvador's twelve regional departments. The hardest hit area was the central part of the country near the capital of San Salvador. In the department of San Vicente, the Acahuapa River flooded several communities, and a landslide off the base of the San Vicente Volcano caused an estimated 82 deaths. According to press reports, 1,500 people have lost their homes and 500 people are missing in San Vicente. The GOES currently estimates a total of 157 deaths countrywide and there are approximately 14,096 homeless in 132 shelters in the affected areas.
ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE

¶3. (U) El Salvador suffered heavy economic and infrastructure losses that the GOES has still not fully quantified. Preliminary estimates are that 209 homes were destroyed, 1,835 homes were damaged, and 24 bridges have either been damaged or destroyed. The agricultural sector was hard hit: the Minister of Agriculture, Manuel Sevilla, currently in the U.S., said the sector has suffered an estimated \$30 million in losses, with approximately 80% in the country's bean crop. Sevilla said that bean crop damage in neighboring Nicaragua and Honduras will compound this problem since this particular bean, a Salvadoran dietary staple, is not grown outside the region. Additionally, there were significant losses in corn and sugar cane crops, as well as in poultry and cattle. Sevilla stated that coffee losses are estimated at \$1 million.

¶4. (U) Sevilla added he fears that crops will not be able to reach market. Many small-scale farmers have lost their farming equipment and will be unable to harvest their crops without assistance. While in the U.S. this week on official travel, Sevilla plans to request assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, USAID, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to help mitigate the short-term damage to the agricultural sector.

¶5. (U) The GOES announced plans on November 12 to issue \$300 million in Eurobonds to finance disaster relief and recovery. The Legislative Assembly is expected to vote this week on the proposal. According to press reports, the bond measure enjoys broad support across the political spectrum.
USG DISASTER RESPONSE

¶6. (SBU) On November 9, Embassy formally requested and subsequently obtained from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) \$100,000 in initial funding (see reftel). On November 11, additional, pre-positioned OFDA supplies and equipment arrived at Comalapa International Airport. The donation consisted of 200 rolls of plastic, two 5,000 gallon water bladders, 5,400 ten-liter water jugs, and 5,088 personal hygiene kits. OFDA consultants on the ground have worked directly with GOES counterparts to assess the damage from Hurricane Ida.

¶7. (SBU) On November 12, the OFDA Embassy Representative completed purchase orders for local relief supplies, the majority of which are for constructing temporary shelters. The purchases consist of 24,000 liters of potable water, 4,000 gallons of fuel for GOES helicopter and surveillance aircraft, 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel for GOES trucks delivering relief supplies, 1,100 metal sheets for roofing, 3,000 wooden posts and braces to construct shelters, 1,000 nails, 300 hammers and saws, and 2,000 mattresses.

¶8. (SBU) Responding to a request made directly from President Funes to the Charge, the U.S. Military has also provided multiple, rapid, and effective assistance to the GOES. JTF-Bravo provided 4 helicopters to conduct damage assessment flights and resupply missions to some of the most remote and isolated locations. The U.S. Military medical assessment team plans to meet with the Ministry of Health on November 12 to explore areas of cooperation and the Army Corps of Engineers has contributed an assessment team to evaluate the damage to bridges. Southcom has made available additional humanitarian funds and has approved a medical readiness training exercise.

FOREIGN GOVERNMENT DONATIONS

¶9. (SBU) Jaime Miranda, the Vice Minister of Foreign Relations, announced on November 11 that the GOES to date received approximately \$702,000 in material and cash donations from foreign

governments. The Government of Japan donated \$220,000 of material assistance, mostly potable water and temporary shelters. The Government of Venezuela flew in a shipment of food and medicine on a Venezuelan military aircraft yesterday. The Venezuelans also brought in a disaster response team to the town of Verapaz to survey infrastructure damage. The Governments of Guatemala, Panama and Spain also donated material assistance. The Government of Taiwan donated \$200,000, while the Governments of Canada and Italy pledged \$30,000 and \$40,000 in cash.

¶10. (SBU) International organizations and private businesses have also pledged assistance. The Inter-American Development Bank donated \$200,000 in non-reimbursable funds and offered a \$20 million line of credit that will be formally approved later this week. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has offered \$400,000 in assistance, while UNICEF and the Pan American Health Organization have donated oral rehydration solutions. Several Salvadoran private businesses have come forward with donations, in addition to aid that has come in from NGOs and organizations of Salvadorans abroad.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: U.S. disaster relief efforts, highlighted by the fast delivery of OFDA goods and money, and the helicopters and other military assistance, have been rapid, effective, and visible. Embassy is greatly appreciative of USG support, especially from Southcom and USAID. El Salvador will require a lot more help to get over this natural disaster, which hit the country near the bottom of the recessionary cycle. END COMMENT.

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